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24.02 Moral Problems and the Good Life
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Objective Goods and the Good Life

I. Overview

What makes someone's life go best? What constitutes an individual's well-being?

Possibilities:

Experiential Quality Theories

Narrow Hedonism (Bentham)

Preference Hedonism: My life goes well to the extent that I have the kinds of pleasure (or experiences more generally) I want to have, i.e., to have *welcomed* experiences.

Desire Satisfaction Theories

Unrestricted: My life goes well to the extent that my desires (or the ones to which I give greatest weight) are satisfied.

Informed/Rational Desire Satisfaction (Brandt): My life goes well to the extent that my rational, informed, desires are satisfied.

Souped-Up Agent's Rational Desire Satisfaction (Railton): My life goes well to the extent that the desires my "souped-up" self would have are satisfied in my life.

Objective List Theories

Aristotelian (Nussbaum)

Hybrid Theories

Lovers (and Achievers) of the Good (Kraut)

II. Kraut Against Desire Satisfaction (page numbers in Kraut indicated by 'K'.)

Examples:

Self-Punisher: we can rationally, and intentionally, desire things that aren't good for us.

Altruist: we can rationally desire what's good for others, to our own detriment.

Rock Thrower: we can have random whims to do things that aren't good for us.

Goodness and Life Projects: "The desires that are good to satisfy are those that organize our lives and lead to projects that absorb considerable time and energy." (K, 41)

Icicle Fanatic: we can have life projects whose pursuit is not good for us.

Paternalist: sometimes others know better than we do what's good for us.

Schoolchild: We give children education not because they want it, or even because they will want it. (Education affects what we want, so if we don't educate someone, they might not ever want it.) We educate children in order to give them desires for things that are good.

Conclusion: The desire theory says that what confers goodness on things is the fact that we want them. But this is wrong. Some things are "worthy of being wanted by having certain characteristics. If they lack features that make them worth wanting, then the fact that we want them does not make up for that deficiency." (K, 44)

III. Objective List Theories

Things are worthy of being wanted or valued because they are objectively good. Following this line of thought, some theorists have argued for an objective list theory:

Objective List: My life goes well to the extent that it includes things that are objectively good.

Deciding on the objective list: On what basis can we claim that a particular list of goods is *objective*? Isn't there disagreement about what is good or bad, and how can we settle these disagreements?

Kraut's view is that something is objectively good if it is the sort of thing that has qualities that we can come to recognize and care about through a process of reasoned reflection. "If we are experienced and articulate, we can say a great deal about why we love our favorite novel or a piece of music or a friend. This is because we become attached to these objects through a process of training that makes us adept at recognizing and articulating certain properties that we respond to." (K, 45)

This raises the question, however, whether there are things that are objectively good for those who cannot reason and reflect on the qualities of objects. Kraut proposes a more general account of well-being: "...the good for each animal consists in leading the kind of life that is appropriate to its nature." Reasoned reflection is important to leading a good human life, because it is part of our nature to reflect on and choose how to live.

Martha Nussbaum (with Amartya Sen) has developed an Aristotelian account of human flourishing that is more comprehensive (reading available on recommended reading list; references to Nussbaum indicated by 'N'):

- There is considerable agreement across cultures on the basic human goods.
- We can begin to determine what the basic goods are by asking "What are the functions, lacking which, a life is not fully human?"
 - What changes in a life would destroy the human being?
 - What must be present in a life alien from ours that qualify it as a human life?

Central Human Functional Capabilities (N, 41-2)

1. *Life*
2. *Bodily health and integrity*
3. *Bodily integrity*
4. *Senses, imagination, thought*
5. *Emotions*
6. *Practical reason*
7. *Affiliation:* (a) being able to live for and in relation to others; (b) having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation.
8. *Connection to other species.*
9. *Play*
10. *Control over one's environment:* (a) Political: being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; (b) Material: being able to hold property, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.

Nussbaum argues that these are things such that "it is always rational to want them, whatever else one wants." (N, 45). Her view is that governments and public policy ought to make it a goal to provide the opportunity to develop each of these capabilities to its citizens, allowing them to decide for themselves whether and to what extent to realize the capability.

Problem: Would my life be better if I got these (allegedly) objectively good things but didn't want them? Last time we considered the following principle:

Internalist Principle: *How things go for X is determined—to some substantial degree—by what X desires.*

The objective list theory doesn't seem to do justice to this idea.

IV. Kraut and the Love of the Good (Hybrid Theory)

Kraut claims that there are three conditions that make for a good life (44):

- a) One must love something (this captures the internalist idea)
- b) What one loves must be worth loving (this captures the objective list idea)
- c) One must be related in the right way to what one loves (this puts them together).

Problems?

1) It may be that there is a basic set of things that are objectively good for everyone, but presumably a truly good life includes more than the basics. But beyond these, can we really say that what's good is objective? Does Kraut's emphasis on reasoned reflection about the worthiness of objects provide us with a basis for determining what is objectively good? How is it related to his pluralism about the good?

2) If we want to pursue a good life, we must determine what is objectively good. But how? Are some people less capable of good lives because they are less capable of figuring out what is objectively good? Isn't what counts as a good life *for me* linked to what I am capable of?